



NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the inaugural newsletter of the WDFW Warmwater Fish Program (WWFP). Its purpose is to keep our warmwater anglers informed of activities within the program such as personnel changes, research, angling activities throughout the state, and updated regulations.

Volunteer Angler Diary Program

I would like to take the time to make a pitch for the program. To be blunt, I consider this program starting at ground zero. I know it has been ongoing for several years, but I have no familiarity with that. I don't know where we are strong and where we are weak in garnering angler participation. The data we gather is important and is used. Due to budget cuts and shifts in the activities of personnel, game checks and creel surveys do not occur with any regularity. Bag checks and creel surveys enable the agency to monitor angler effort and catch, which can be used to modify or change sport fishing regulations. In other instances, some game fish are so elusive (i.e., tiger muskie) that any data we can get is a bonus.

I also welcome suggestions as to how the program can be improved and keep interest up. My master list of participants lists 110 individuals. In 2000 we received diary sheets from 45 individuals and in 2001 we received diary sheets from 24 individuals. These numbers may be a little inflated because some of these sheets were sent in by individuals that were not actively participating in the program (friend or family member), but were with someone who was. I would like to reverse the decline in participation. The first thing I want to accomplish is to avoid the "sending the data into a black hole" syndrome. Meaning, I don't want anyone to think that their effort isn't appreciated, nor is their data collected and nothing done with it. Second, I receive angler diary sheets at the end of the calendar year. A report is produced following the entry of the data. However, since I get the diary sheets at the end of the year, I can't provide any feedback during the fishing season. If feedback (other than the annual report) is something you want, then we need to modify/change the current system.

Fishing Contests

Fishing Contest regulations were modified to strengthen the definition of permittee and to provide better enforcement. The number of contests per permittee remains unchanged at seven. However, juvenile fishing contests no longer count towards the seven contest limit. A contest is defined as 6 or more licensed anglers competing for a prize. The prize limit for non-exempt contests increased from \$400 to \$1,000. A non-exempt tournament is one in which the mortality of bass and walleye is greater than 10%. Any violations of the rules will result in a 2-year penalty and revocation of permits.

Walleye Indexing Project by Inland Fish Research

Inland Fish Research has been assigned the task of determining an index sampling protocol for the large walleye waters of Eastern Washington (excluding the mainstem of the Columbia River). Index sampling is sampling the population of fish over time using a standardized technique and amount of effort. The index sampling for walleye in Washington will take place once per year (in the fall) per water, using the minimal amount of effort that will provide enough data to monitor and identify changes or lack of changes in the population over time.

Some midwestern states have used index monitoring on some of their key walleye waters for up to 509 years, but Washington has no such program. Originally WDFW has communicated with Wisconsin and Minnesota to see if their monitoring protocol might work for Washington, but after similar discussion with a research group in Ontario, Canada, WDFW decided to adopt their protocol instead (Canadian Protocol). It made no sense to develop a new protocol because the Canadian Protocol has been under development for years to make it as efficient and effective as possible for the amount of time and effort expended. Also, this protocol has been adopted by all the Canadian provinces and will very likely be adopted by some of the midwestern states and New York state. In addition, the Spokane Tribe will be using this protocol on Lake Roosevelt. By adopting the Canadian Protocol in Washington State, it will make all the information WDFW gathers even more important because it will have been collected in a standardized way. That will enable WDFW to compare its data to other parts of the country and Canada; similar to the idea of using a standardized warmwater survey.

WDFW tested this protocol last fall in Sprague and Banks lakes with promising results. This fall WDFW will be sampling Sprague and Banks again, along with Moses, Potholes, Roosevelt and Scootney. WDFW will be collaborating with the Spokane Tribe on Lake Roosevelt. In addition, this fall WDFW will be training the regional staffs on their associated lakes because starting in the fall of 2003 each region will be responsible for the index sampling in their region on a yearly basis.



Regs and Rules Changes

As many of you are well aware, new regulations for channel catfish, bass, and walleye took effect this past May. The rationale behind the changes was to 1) increase the harvest of fish that were otherwise being lost to natural mortality; 2) standardize regulations where possible; 3) decrease potential negative interactions between salmon and bass, and 4) improve the health of panfish populations.

Channel Catfish

The channel catfish currently being stocked in this state are between 10 and 12" in length. The majority of catfish being harvested are well over 12" and the current angling pressure on catfish is not preventing adequate recruitment of larger fish into the harvest. There was also an intent to standardize the regulations in lakes and rivers.

- Statewide – No minimum size. 5 fish daily limit.
- Yakima, Snake, and Columbia (below Priest Rapids) rivers - No minimum size. No daily limit.
- Gissburg Ponds (Snohomish County) and Fazon Lake (Whatcom County) – No minimum size. 2 fish daily limit.

Bass

The intent of the new regulations is to maintain stable populations of bass. An indirect benefit of having healthy bass populations is in waters where they co-occur with panfish. The panfish populations will be improved by the bass preying on excess production. The new regulations are also the best option in waters where bass and salmonids interact because of the reduced number of small bass, which are doing the majority of predation on salmonid fry and smolts.

- Statewide – No minimum size. 5 fish daily limit. Only bass less than 12 inches or greater than 17 inches may be kept. Only one bass can be over 17 inches.
- Coffee Pot Lake – No minimum size. 2 fish daily limit. Only fish 14 inches and less can be kept.
- Yakima River – No minimum size. No daily limit. Only bass less than 12" or greater than 17 inches may be kept. No more than one bass can be over 17 inches.
- Moses Lake, Snake River, and Columbia River (below Priest Rapids) – No minimum size. 5 fish daily limit. No more than 3 fish can be greater than 15 inches.
- Silver Lake – water dogs and salamanders will be allowed to be used as bait.
- Stan Coffin Lake – catch and release fishing only.

Walleye

The new regulations were created to allow for the harvest of these fish that otherwise were lost to natural mortality.

- Statewide – 16-inch minimum size. 5 fish daily limit. Only one fish can be over 22 inches.
- Lake Roosevelt, Colville River (mouth to bridge at town of Valley), and Spokane River (mouth to Seven Mile Bridge) – No minimum size. 5 fish daily limit. Only one fish can be over 18 inches.

- Moses Lake, Columbia River (above Hwy. 395 bridge to Grand Coulee Dam), and Snake River – 18 inch minimum size. 5 fish daily limit. Only one fish can be over 24 inches.
- Columbia River (Hwy. 395 bridge to mouth) – 10 fish daily limit with no more than five fish over 18 inches. Only one fish can be over 24 inches.

Tiger Muskie Tagging Study

A tagging study was initiated this year in order to improve upon evaluating the tiger muskies that are planted in Washington lakes. Currently, 11 lakes: Mayfield Lake (Lewis County), Curlew Lake (Ferry County, Evergreen Reservoir (Grant County), Fazon Lake (Whatcom County), Green Lake (King County), Merwin Reservoir (Clark and Cowlitz counties), Newman Lake (Spokane County), Redrock Lake (Grant County), South Lewis County Pond (Lewis County), Tapps Lake (Pierce County), and Silver Lake (Spokane County) are receiving plants of tiger muskies.

In June, WDFW staff tagged close to 5,000 juvenile tiger muskies at the Ron Meseberg Rearing Facility located at the WDFW Ringold state fish hatchery. Each fish was implanted with a coded-wire tag (CWT) in its anal fin. A CWT is approximately 1.5 mm long and is magnetized. In subsequent years fish will be tagged in different areas to identify each year class. When lakes containing tiger muskies are surveyed, those tiger muskies caught can be "wanded." The wand detects the electromagnetic field of the CWT and produces a beep. This is similar to how a metal detector works. Therefore, if a fish encountered has been tagged, the wand will give off a beep. The location of the tag can also be identified. Knowing this, the year the fish was stocked can be determined. Prior research has indicated that the retention rate of CWTs is very good. A subsample of fish have also been tagged with a visual implant elastomer (VIE) tags. A VIE tag is sequentially numbered and comes in different



VIE tag being injected into a tiger muskie



Tiger muskie getting injected with a CWT using a Mark IV tagging machine

colors. It is injected into a subsurface area of the skin and is visible to the human eye. A subsample of 200 tiger muskies were also tagged with VIE tags. The purpose of this was to evaluate the retention rate of CWT tags in tiger muskies.